



OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS  
occupied Palestinian territory

## The Gaza Strip: Access Report January 2006

This report monitors access in and out of the Gaza Strip. Movement in and out of the Gaza Strip is controlled through:

- Erez crossing for Palestinian workers and merchants and medical referrals who have permits to enter Israel;
- Erez crossing for international organisations;
- Rafah crossing, between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, for access to other countries, including for overseas medical referrals; and
- Four commercial crossings, of which Karni crossing is the largest.

All movement between Israel and the Gaza Strip is controlled by the Israeli authorities. Fences and a concrete wall surround the Gaza Strip, Palestinian access to the sea is controlled by IDF naval vessels and Palestinian air traffic is prohibited.

### 1. Erez crossing

#### a. Access for Palestinian workers and traders into Israel (Figure 1)

Erez crossing is the only access point for Gazan workers and traders with valid permits to enter Israel. Erez crossing closed on 16 December following Palestinian militants firing of rocket into Israel. With the exception of some traders (105) crossing on 17 January, there was no movement of Palestinians (labour) into Israel until 22 January 2006. This is reflected in the low daily average movement for this month.<sup>1</sup> When Erez was open, daily labour movement peaked at 4,200 workers and 170 traders on 31 January. The crossing was also closed on 25 January at the request of the Palestinian Authority (PA) due to the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections.

On 19 January an Israeli private security company (Sheleg Lavan) was contracted by the Israeli Ministry of Defence to conduct searches and other such operations at the crossing. The IDF continues to coordinate access as in the past. Longer delays have been reported for Palestinian workers and traders related to this transition of responsibilities.

#### Key Events 2006:

- 16 December – 21 January: Erez crossing was closed for Palestinian workers and traders following an escalation of Palestinian militants' firing of rockets into Israel. Some humanitarian cases were allowed access with prior coordination.

#### b. Access for medical referrals (Figure 2)

Medical referrals require passage through Erez crossing for treatment in Israel. In January, 97% of a total of 741 medical requests were granted passage through Erez crossing by Israeli authorities. All those granted permits for medical referrals were able to cross through Erez crossing, including during times of closure with prior coordination. The percentage of requests granted passage in a given month has remained above 90% since October 2005.

#### c. Access for humanitarian organisations

International humanitarian organisations require prior coordination with Israeli authorities to enter and leave the Gaza Strip through Erez crossing. A small number of high-level Palestinian UN staff members are permitted to cross.

On 19 January, with the new Israeli private company assuming security responsibilities, the crossing was closed for internationals "due to technical difficulties at the crossing". The security company also randomly required that vehicles (excluding those of diplomatic passport holders) leaving Erez crossing to Israel submit to a search in a closed area where the driver was not allowed to be present. This requirement was made mandatory for all vehicles crossing through Erez from 30 January. An additional search of the vehicle including inside by a sniffer-dog has also been put in place. Such a practice contradicts the 1946 Conventions of Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations. As a result since 30 January non-diplomat UN staff members have not crossed through Erez to enter Israel.

### 2. Karni crossing

Most goods imported into the Gaza Strip and all exported goods pass through Karni crossing.<sup>2</sup> In January 2006 Karni crossing was closed for prolonged periods. It was closed from 10 – 13 January due to the Palestinian celebration of Eid al Adha, and again from 15 January until the end of the month due to IDF stated security concerns over a possible tunnel leading to the crossing (See, *Gaza Strip Situation Report, 31 January for more details*).<sup>3</sup>

#### a. Commercial goods (Figure 3)

On 15 November, an agreement was reached between the PA and the Government of Israel (GoI) "...facilitating the movement of people and goods within the Palestinian territories and on opening an international crossing on the Gaza-Egypt border that will put the Palestinians in control of the entry and exit of people" (the 15 November Agreement).

Since the 15 November Agreement the daily average volume of imported goods remained fairly stable while exports increased in the last six weeks of 2005. However, the flow of goods dropped significantly in January 2006 due to the closure at Karni crossing.

Imports of goods to the Gaza Strip remained fairly stable in 2005, with an average of 4,561 truckloads per month. In January 2006 the volume of imported goods fell to 1,954 truckloads of goods imported, a daily average of 78. The closure at Karni also created a shortage of basic goods inside the Gaza Strip, notably dairy products, certain fruits and construction materials. The Palestinian Ministry of Health also reported that they were running low on medical supplies and had to draw on emergency stocks.

The 15 November Agreement sets a goal of 150 daily exported truckloads by end of 2005 and 400 by the end of 2006. In January 2006 the daily exported truckloads reached 23.<sup>4</sup>

The closure also coincided with the peak of the agricultural season in the Gaza Strip. The 15 November Agreement committed Israel to “permit the export of all agricultural products from Gaza during this 2005 harvest season.” More than 100 tonnes of strawberries, flowers, cherry tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers that were soiled were subsequently destroyed or donated locally to hospitals and NGOs. The loss of value in exports is estimated by PalTrade as US\$ 500,000 a day or US\$ 7 million between 15 – 31 January.

#### **b. Humanitarian supplies**

International humanitarian relief supplies, of which the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) handle most, was also impacted by the closure at Karni crossing in January. At the end of January, UNRWA had 90 laden containers of humanitarian supplies waiting at Ashdod port, some of them ready for crossing into the Gaza Strip. UNRWA started to engage with the Israeli authorities to find alternative crossing points for the entrance of these supplies. (The re-opening of Karni crossing 5 February called off the negotiations.)

UNICEF and United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) also rely on Karni crossing for the entry of their humanitarian supplies into the Gaza Strip. Due to the closure of Karni from mid-January, UNICEF had to re-route approximately 15,000 vials of different vaccines and other medical supplies for use in the Gaza Strip to Ramallah in the West Bank. To minimize the impact of closure, in 2003 WFP took the precautionary step of maximising local purchase of food commodities from the Gaza Strip and pre-positioning stocks in advance of the planned distribution dates. As of 15 December 2003, 95% Gaza supplies (wheat flour and oil) have been purchased within the Gaza Strip. The closure of Karni crossing this month therefore did not have a significant impact on WFP distributions.

### **3. Rafah crossing**

Rafah passenger crossing is the point of access for Gazans travelling overseas and is located on the Gazan border with Egypt.

#### **a. Palestinians’ access internationally from the Gaza Strip (Figure 4)**

Since 18 December, Rafah crossing has operated from 8am to 4pm. From 13 – 17 January, the opening hours were extended up to 20 hours in order to facilitate the Muslim pilgrims’ return from Mecca. The influx of people arriving from the Hajj and the extended opening hours led to a daily average increasing to 897 people arriving and 719 people departing compared to 537 and 577 respectively in December 2005.

#### **b. Import of international goods**

Kerem Shalom crossing in Israel, bordering the Gaza Strip and Egypt, will operate as an additional crossing point for imported goods primarily originating from Egypt and for non-Palestinian identification card holders arriving to the Gaza Strip from Egypt. This crossing is currently not operating and a final agreement on the crossing between the PA and the GoI is yet to be reached.

#### **c. Restrictions on medical referrals<sup>5</sup>**

Medical referrals require passage through Rafah crossing for international treatment. In January, all of the 263 medical requests for referrals abroad crossed through Rafah crossing and an additional 27 emergency medical cases crossed through Rafah in ambulances for treatment abroad.

### **4. Sufa Commercial Crossing (Figure 5)**

Sufa crossing borders Israel and is situated northeast of Rafah crossing. In the past, this crossing point was open for some Palestinians working in the agricultural sector on farms in southern Israel. However, since 30 May 2004 the crossing has only been used for importing construction materials, notably gravel.

In January 2006, the total truckloads of gravel imported at Sufa crossing (2,559) were lower than the previous month but higher than the same month in 2005. However, the amount of gravel imported this month remains lower than pre-intifada figures (the monthly average for the first nine months of 2000 was 4,395 truckloads). This month Sufa was closed on 19 January following a Palestinian rocket attack against an IDF base near the crossing the previous day that injured two IDF soldiers. It was also closed on 25 January due to the PLC elections and remained closed until 29 January due to a “security threat”.

### **5. Nahal Oz energy pipelines (Figure 6)**

Palestine General Petroleum Company (GPC), a company owned by the PA, is importing all fuel (including benzene, diesel and gas) into the Gaza Strip through its Israeli counterpart, Dor Energy at the pipelines of Nahal Oz. Data for imported fuel this month is not available.

### **6. Coastal area**

#### **a. Access for Palestinian fishing (Figure 7)**

The fishing catch in January 2006 (52 tonnes) was lower than the previous month and lower than the catch in January 2000, 2001 and 2004.

Since January 2005, the Israeli authorities have permitted Palestinian fishing up to ten nautical miles from the Gaza Strip coastline compared to six nautical miles previously (under the Oslo Accords, Gaza Strip fishermen are entitled to fish 20 nautical miles from the coast). Palestinian fishing is prohibited one nautical mile north of the border with Egypt and one and a half nautical miles south of the border with Israel. In addition vessels from the Rafah wharf were prohibited to fish on 22 January when Israeli naval gunboats opened fire towards them.

#### b. Seaport

The 15 November Agreement stated that construction of a seaport in the Gaza Strip can commence but is not expected to be operational within two years.

## 7. Airport

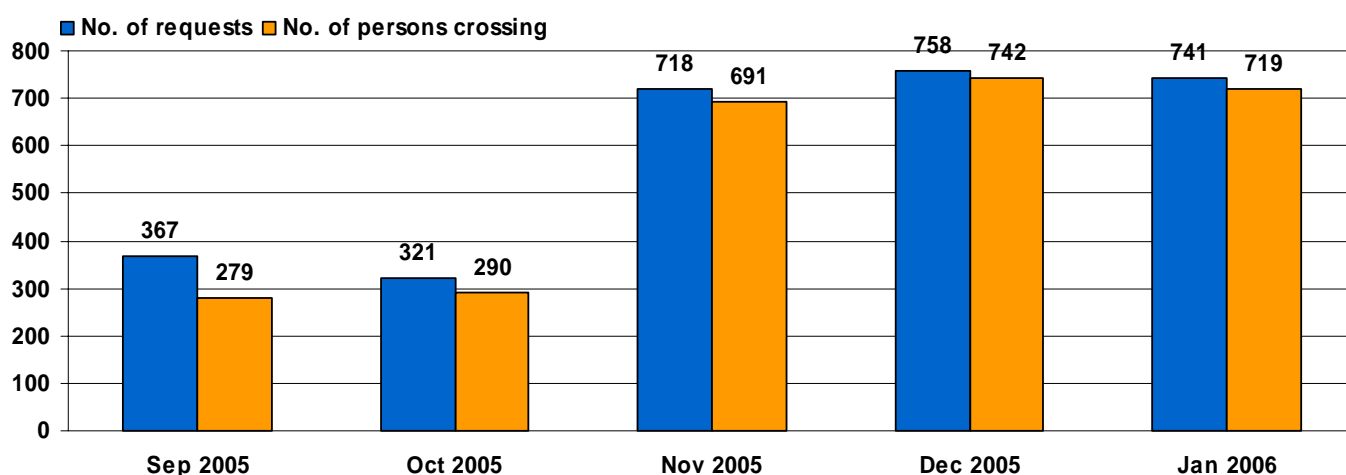
The Palestinian airport in the Gaza Strip has been closed since the beginning of the second *intifada* in late September 2000. The 15 November Agreement mentions “an understanding between the parties [the PA and the GoI] on the importance of an operating Palestinian airport...” although no agreement has been reached on reopening the airport.

**Figure 1: Erez Crossing - average daily labour movement**

	January 2000	January 2004	January 2005	December 2005	January 2006
<b>Workers to Israel</b>	17,635	8,185	49	1,502	891
<b>Traders to Israel</b>	N/A	N/A	17	73	42

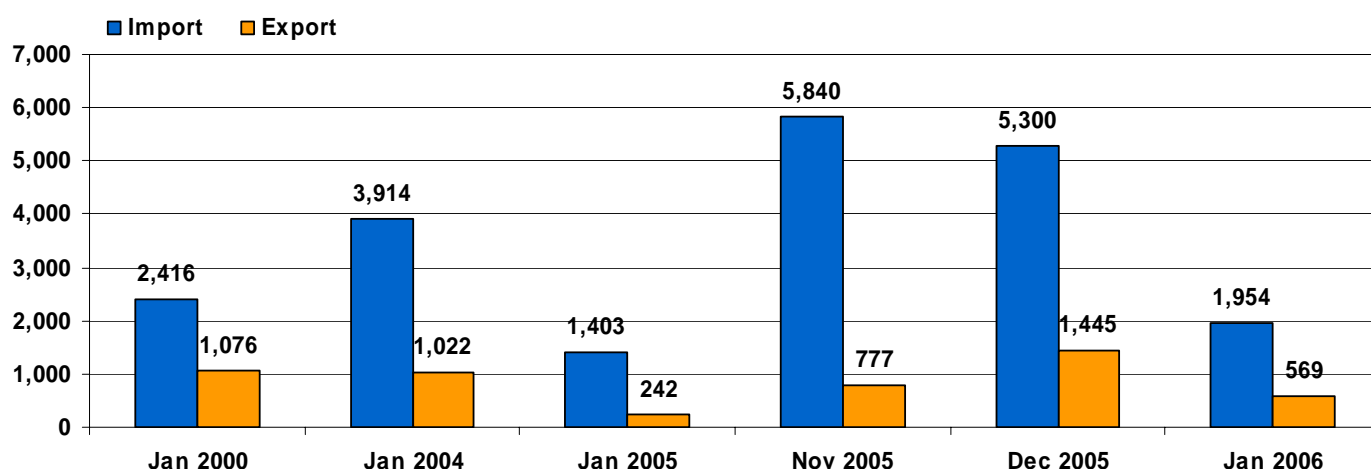
Source: Palestinian National Security Forces; 2000 and 2004 data obtained from UNSCO

**Figure 2: Erez Crossing - total number of medical referral requests and crossing**



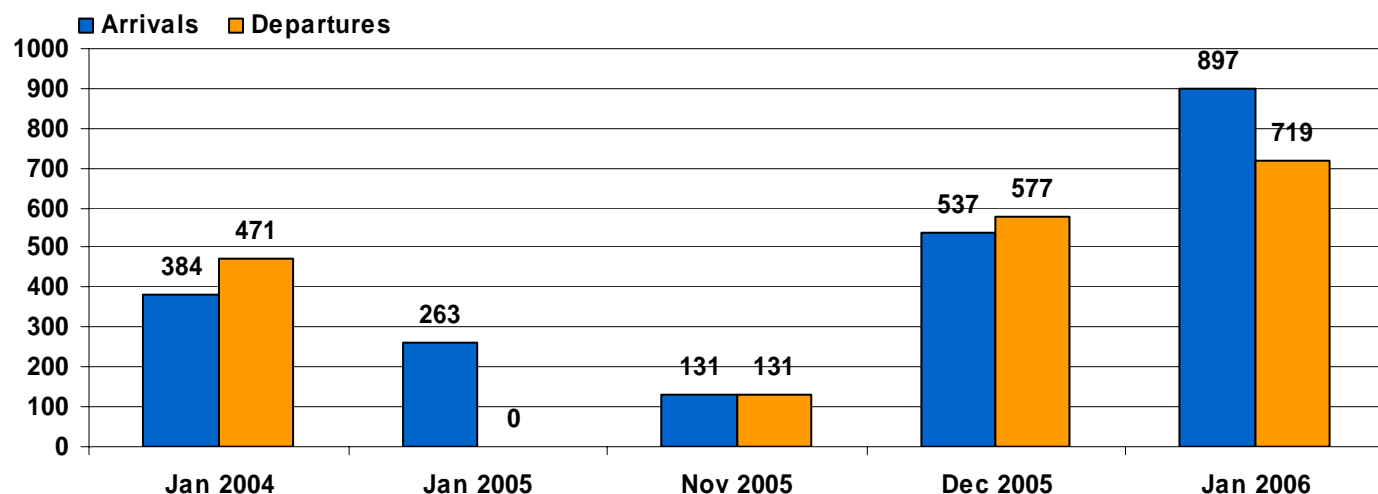
Source: Palestinian Ministry of Health and World Health Organisation.

**Figure 3: Karni Crossing – total monthly truckloads of imports and exports<sup>6</sup>**



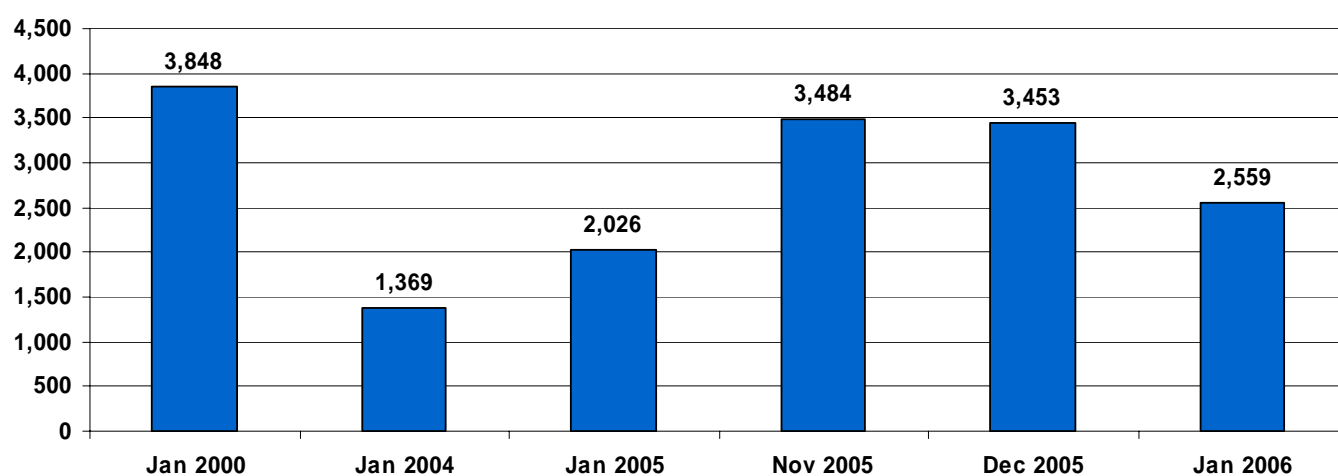
Source: Palestinian Ministry of National Economy; 2000 and 2004 data obtained from UNSCO.

**Figure 4: Rafah Passenger Crossing - average daily crossing**



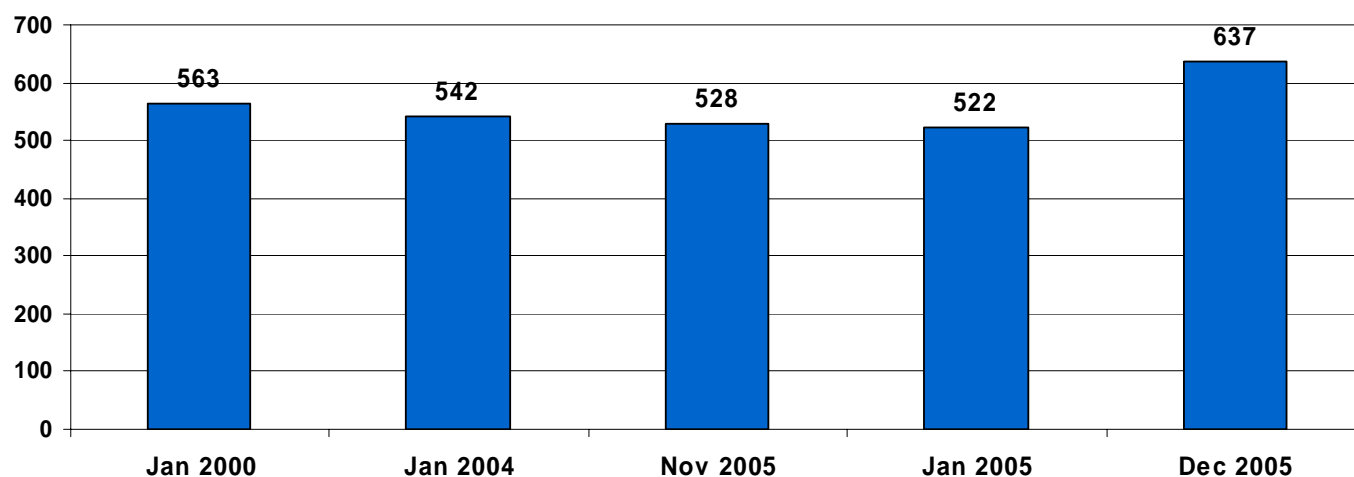
Source: Palestinian Passport and Border police. Jan 2004 data obtained from UNSCO.

**Figure 5: Sufa Commercial Crossing – total imported truckloads of gravel<sup>7</sup>**



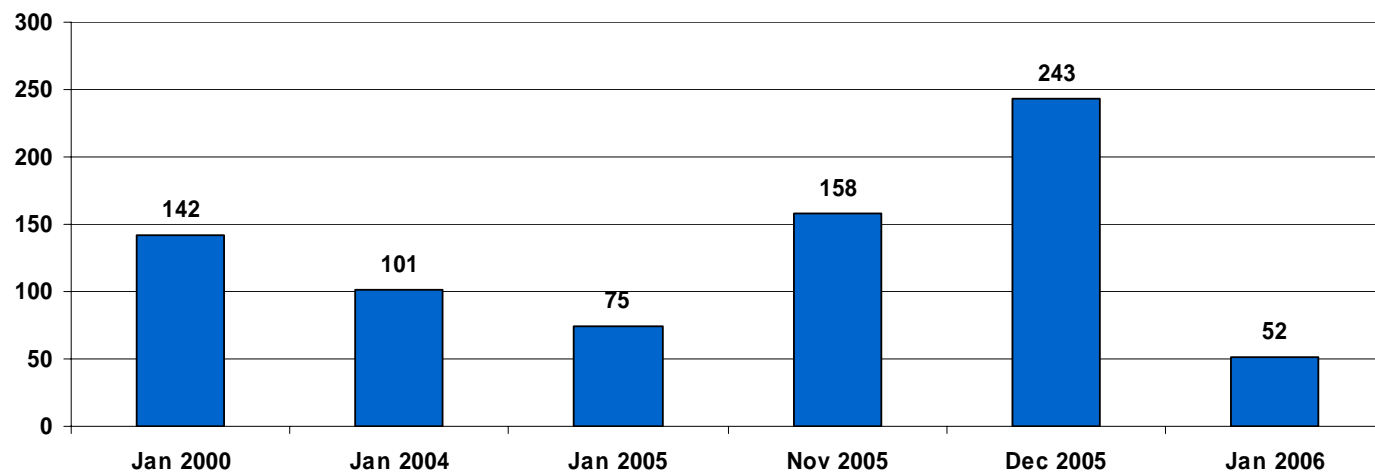
Source: Palestinian Ministry of Finance, data obtained from UNSCO.

**Figure 6: Nahal Oz Pipeline – total imported truckloads of fuel (industrial gasoline excluded)**



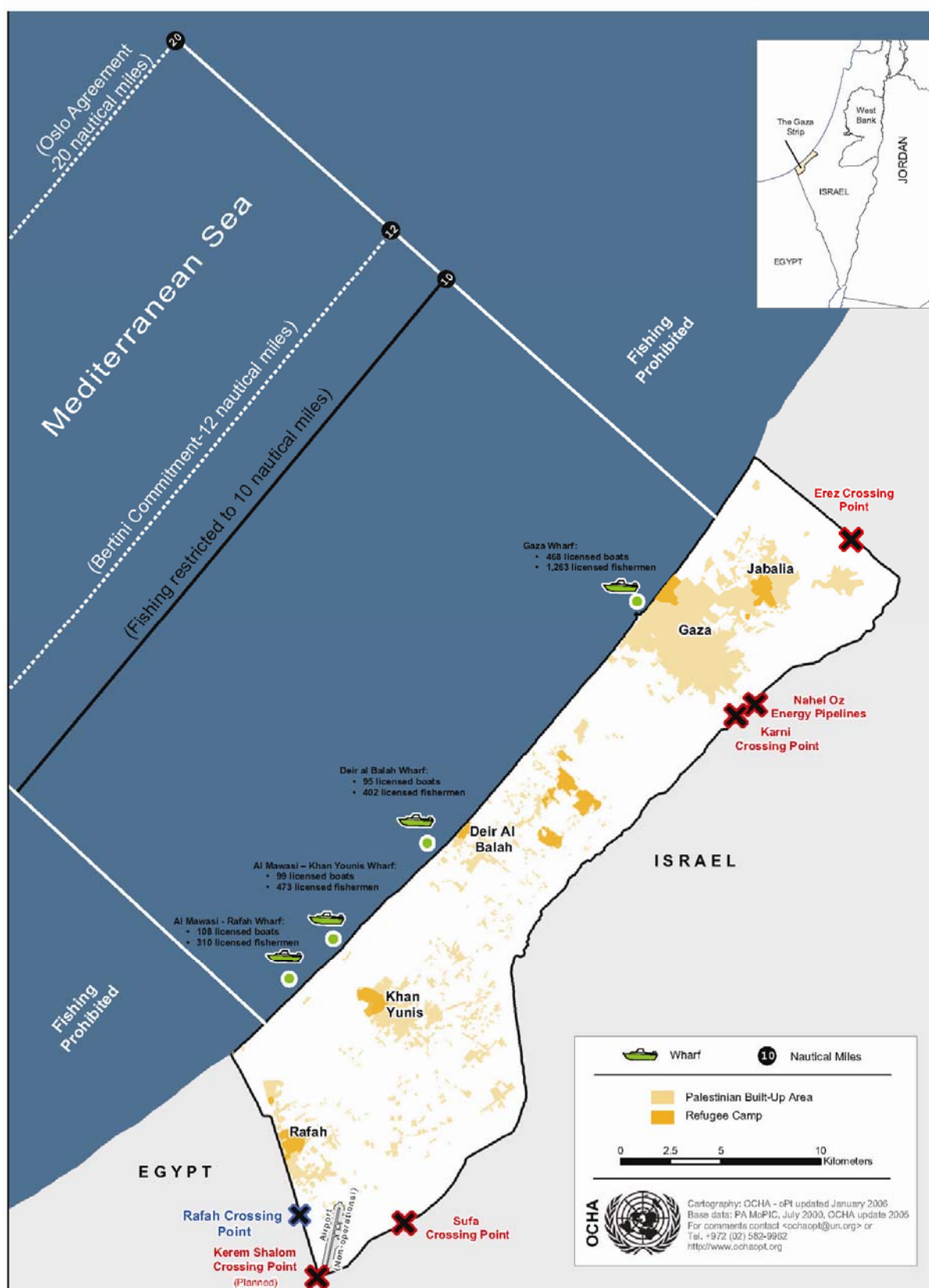
Source: General Petroleum Company (GPC), data obtained from UNSCO.

**Figure 7: Gaza Fishing - total fishing catch in tonnes**



Source: Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture/Department of Fisheries

## THE GAZA STRIP: ACCESS FOR PALESTINIAN FISHING - January 2006



<sup>1</sup> The average daily Palestinian labour movement through Erez crossing is calculated excluding weekends i.e. Fridays and Saturdays.

<sup>2</sup> Some goods (mainly vehicles) are also imported through Erez crossing.

<sup>3</sup> Karni crossing re-opened on 5 February. The PA dug three trenches. No tunnel was found.

<sup>4</sup> The average daily movement number of truckloads of goods through Karni crossing is calculated excluding weekends i.e. Saturdays.

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Health. Data obtained by WHO.

<sup>6</sup> The low numbers in January 2005 were due to a comprehensive closure in the aftermath of a Palestinian attack against the crossing that resulted in the death of six Israelis.

<sup>7</sup> One truckload equals 40 tonnes.